



Traveling Tansu

When Aaron Levine built this rolling tansu chest, based on a traditional Japanese furniture form (like the one below right), he was at the beginning of his woodworking career, serving an apprenticeship under Ross Day in Seattle. Day, drawing on his own training under James Krenov, guided Levine through every step, teaching him dozens of new techniques. Despite all the technical lessons packed into the project, however, “the real epiphany,” Levine recalls, had to do with design. “I idolized Ross’s work, and I wanted to be just like him.” But Day’s furniture was understated and quietly refined, and Levine, with a background in fine art, was attracted to “surfaces that were decorative,

active, and complex.” After finding some astonishing quilted Western maple, he decided to use it for the chest. When it was built and he sprayed the lacquer finish, “this wood that had looked somewhat exciting just exploded in depth and color. It was thrilling—I’ll never forget it.” Looking back across the years now, Levine says that building the piece taught him that even if there was much still to learn from other craftsmen, “to progress as a designer I have to follow my own instincts.”

—Jonathan Binzen



Photos: courtesy Aaron Levine (top); Jonathan Binzen (inset)

How They Did It Turn to p. 90 to see how Levine tackled the challenges of making this tansu chest.

Audio Slide Show To see and hear about the dynamic furniture Levine has made since this chest, go to FineWoodworking.com/extras.